

## Networking, For Love And Money

“In the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,” wrote Tennyson in 1842, but having borne the burden of his family’s finances after the death of his father a decade earlier he was well aware that a young poet’s yearning for a steady job extends year-round. As the twin pursuits of employment and romance each travel along the well-trod paths of distinct networks, this paper will turn its fancy to some of the similarities and differences between the two.

“Schmoozing can help you get a job, move up in a job, and advance your career.”

– *Vault.com*

At first glance, romantic networking and employment networking would both appear to be examples of social networks; that is to say, they each are based on relationships and communication between people. If we are to define networks in terms of *nodes*, *connections*, and *contents*, then for both romantic and employment networks the collection of nodes must include people. After all, both networks exist so that people can ultimately locate other people who can offer them something, be it love or money.

Some may argue that although romantic networking is obviously an interaction that occurs between people, employment networking necessarily involves the relationship between people and companies. But what are companies but aggregations of people tightly networked within a more formalized framework?<sup>1</sup> Hiring decisions are not made by companies *per se*; they are made by people who work for those companies. Savvy job applicants realize that their goal is to locate the person who makes the ultimate hiring decision and convince them to offer them a given job.

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<sup>1</sup> Dare we utter the word *subnet*?

It is also important to note that romantic and employment networks often include people who are not actively seeking a new love or a new job. Most matchmakers, while important nodes in dating networks, are often already in committed relationships. And someone with a steady job may point a job-seeker towards a certain company or make an introduction without being in the market for a new position themselves.

While these people help to connect people who may not know each other, they are not *connections* in networking terms. Rather, they are *nodes* in their own right. The *connections* between them are any of the ways that two people can communicate information between each other, such as talking, telephone, email, or, of course, a resume or love letter.

‘What wilt thou give me,’ said Robin Hood, ‘In ready gold or fee,  
To help thee to thy true-love again, And deliver her unto thee?’

– *English Ballad*

So, our models of romantic networks and employment networks are similar. They each involve a group of people actively looking for other people with support from social networks that help connect compatible partners. But this picture is obviously incomplete, since anyone who has ever used personal ads or a career board knows that social networks are not the only way to find a partner or job to love. The question is, are these various mediators *nodes* or *connections*?

This is a tricky question, but I would argue that because they disseminate information in to persons unknown, rather than transmit them directly to a known entity, they can be classified as nodes rather than connections. If a lonely heart posts an email to a girl whose ad he has seen in the Village Voice, that letter is a *connection*. That is, he knows the identity of the node he is sending a message to, and he is simply using that letter to communicate directly with her. But the original ad, posted without knowing who might read it, was communicated to a *node* – that is, the Village Voice – in the hopes that it might be forwarded and disseminated to anonymous prospective partners.

Thus, while modern romantic networks or employment networks are still built around traditional social networks, they are no longer limited to interactions between people.<sup>2</sup> Before the advent of the printed communication, these contacts were by nature made in person or by word-of-mouth – for example, by recruiters or matchmakers – but technology is now used to distribute information in ways that transcend these traditional means. In fact, by filtering profiles and resumes automatically, some digital classified ads or personals sites have started to assume roles as intelligent matchmakers, rather than simply replacing the newspaper classifieds.

“Do you suppose I could buy back my introduction to you?”

– Groucho Marx

Our analysis so far would indicate that romantic and employment networks are so similar as to be undistinguishable, but anyone who has been on both a date and a job interview knows that the two are very different experiences. True, in a broad sense the information that flows within the two types of networks is similar – a description of personal characteristics, either offered or sought, with an eye towards making a match between the two. But the specific type of information shared is often quite different, as are the rules for how that information is disseminated. Thus, we can say that for the most part these networks differ in terms of *content* and *protocols*.

Although the two sometimes overlap, the information shared in a job search is rarely the same information sought in a personals ad.<sup>3</sup> Some daters, like some employers, may think it important that their potential match has attended a top university, but an ability to code in Perl or an intimate knowledge of currency markets is not often a priority in the dating scene. Likewise, having nice eyes and a pretty smile may earn you a job interview at a law firm, but they won't land you the job if you haven't passed the bar exam. And unlike most Voice readers, few employers would appreciate learning that one is “sexy in a funky monkey way”.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that this description of romantic networks assumes that the person looking for love has the freedom to choose their partner. In some cultures, this is not the case, and romantic networks may be limited to interpersonal connections between different families that result in pre-arranged marriages.

<sup>3</sup> As I write this, one of the Voice's “Anything Goes” ads reads, “Looking for Secretary”!

Similarly, the protocols of each network are different. A face-to-face meeting is rarely the first step in a job search, but networking on the dating scene works best if all concerned know firsthand that you are not physically repulsive. Many human resources departments discourage phone calls from applicants, whereas following up a date with a phone call is almost obligatory. And if one projected the same seriousness and gravitas while dating that they do in a job interview, they might not even have that phone call returned.

“Women like to feel it's part science, part magic, that there's an element of fate. There's literally millions of bachelors out there and you could meet him in a week or a month or in six months.”<sup>4</sup>

– *Katie Mitic, the general manager of Yahoo Personals*

There is no doubt that the advent of technology has expanded our romantic and employment networks. The effect on romantic networks, in particular, is qualitative as well as quantitative. Now that we are able to formalize and codify our romantic networks using technological networks as well as social ones, we are less willing to leave love to chance. Finding that special someone can be now approached in much the same way as we search for jobs.

Financially strapped, Tennyson was unable to marry his sweetheart until 1850 – thirteen years after their engagement. One can only wonder: had he lived today, could HotJobs or Monster.com have helped him find work sooner? Or would his thoughts of love have been distracted by another's profile on Nerve.com?

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<sup>4</sup> “Online Dating”, [The New York Times](#), January 27, 2003